

“And So, With the Help of God”

The Byzantine Art of War in the Tenth Century

ROBERT S. NELSON

*Then the spears of the enemy infantrymen standing in front of their cavalry will be smashed by our kataphraktoi, while their arrows and the menaula of their javeliners will be ineffective because of the armor of our kataphraktoi.
And so, with the help of God, the enemy will be routed.*

Thus the Byzantine governor and military authority Nikephoros Ouranos concluded a discussion of tactics, provided the first part of the title of my paper, and introduced its concern for divine aid in war.¹ But what of my subtitle? What might constitute a visual art of war in Byzantium? At the outset, it is easier to say what my paper does not address. Historians might expect remarks about military tactics or siege machines, topics addressed in important military treatises of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and an abiding interest of later periods as well.² Art historians might look for a discussion of the famed Joshua Roll and those scenes based upon it that are depicted on rosette caskets of the tenth century, phenomena perhaps inspired in part by military campaigns in Syria, as Meyer Schapiro argued long ago.³ But illustrations

of tactics, battles, or biblical narratives are not the concern of this essay. Rather, it focuses on images that authorize and legitimate the emperor to wage war and prevail against his enemies. This imagery may or may not be overtly militant in character according to our standards. The tenth century is a useful period for examining the convergence of art and war because of the abundance of historical sources and recent secondary literature on them, and a relative neglect of the era in recent art historical literature. Formerly, the tenth century, broadly considered, was a popular period of study among art historians, but that interest peaked a couple of generations ago, making it fertile territory to revisit in light of new historical scholarship.⁴

1 *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos, 57.13, ed. E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC, 2008), 104–5.

2 E.g., *Parangelmata Poliorcetica*, ed. D. F. Sullivan, *Siegecraft: Two Tenth-Century Instructional Manuals by Heron of Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 2000).

3 M. Schapiro, “The Place of the Joshua Roll in Byzantine History,” *GBA* ser. 6, 35 (1949): 161–76. On the Joshua scenes in ivory, see C. Connor in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261*, ed. H. C. Evans and W. D. Wixom (New York, 1997), 228–29. For warrior figures more

generally on rosette caskets, see A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X–XIII Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1930), pls. II–VIII, XIV–XXXII, XXXIV–XXXVI, LIII–LIV, LVII, LXIX. S. H. Wander, *The Joshua Roll* (Wiesbaden, 2012) appeared too late to be considered in this study.

4 For decades the debate had been over the degree to which there was or was not a “Macedonian Renaissance,” a once hot issue that has passed quietly into the realm of historiography. Initially it concerned the dating of manuscripts some thought to be pre-Iconoclastic but which now are universally assigned to the 9th and 10th centuries. More recently, the discussion has concerned the nature of classicism in the period. The strong advocate of the Renaissance concept was K. Weitzmann, “The Character and Intellectual Origins of the Macedonian Renaissance,” in K. Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical*



FIG. 1 Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, Imperial Door Mosaic (photo: Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC)

Nicolas Oikonomides once wrote that the ideology supporting and legitimating war was “related to the empire and to its personification, the emperor, theoretically appointed by Christ to reign on earth. War was thus placed in the general framework of imperial ideology. . . .”⁵ For that reason, a paper on the art of war might begin and end with the imperial door

and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination, ed. H. L. Kessler (Chicago, 1971), 176–223. See also C. Mango, “The Date of Cod. Vat. Regin. Gr. 1 and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance’,” *Acta IRNOR* 4 (1969): 121–26, which begins (121): “The concept of the Macedonian Renaissance has held in the past thirty years an important place in discussion of Byzantine art.” More recently see H. Maguire, “Epigrams, Art, and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance’,” *DOP* 48 (1994): 105–15. Few of these debates on the nature of classicism directly concern the present paper.

⁵ N. Oikonomides, “The Concept of ‘Holy War’ and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivories,” in *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S.J.*, ed. T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (Washington, DC, 1995), 62.

mosaic at Hagia Sophia (fig. 1), that famous image of an emperor bowing down before Jesus Christ, enthroned as eternal emperor. Discovered during the mid-nineteenth-century restoration of the mosque of Aya Sofya and discussed ineffectually then, the mosaic was again uncovered in 1931–32 by Thomas Whittemore and introduced to a rather different scholarly world, chiefly due to the fact that one of the century’s greatest art historians had received his doctorate a few years earlier.⁶ In 1935, André Grabar wrote Whittemore, requesting an illustration of the mosaic for a book that he was preparing on what he termed “The Symbolic Representations of the Byzantine Imperial Power,” or

⁶ T. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: Preliminary Report on the Year’s Work, 1931–1932, The Mosaics of the Narthex* (Paris, 1933). On the prior history, see R. S. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia, 1850–1950: Holy Wisdom, Modern Monument* (Chicago, 2004), 29–34.

the book that would so successfully launch his career as *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin: Recherches sur l'art officiel de l'empire d'Orient*.⁷ The topic and the approach would continue to interest him and other French scholars for decades.⁸ Grabar interpreted the mosaic in terms of the imperial ceremonies that took place beneath it in the narthex of the church.⁹

In the lunette above, Christ presides on his throne as the all-powerful ruler. In bowing before him, the Byzantine emperor affirms his allegiance and establishes his status as vice-regent of Christ on earth. The heavenly and the earthly courts intermingle to the decided advantage of the latter. The emperor is not identified, suggesting that a generalized meaning is intended. However, this anonymity has challenged many to attempt to date the mosaic by stylistic means and to attempt to associate its creation with a specific historical event. While art historians now agree that the mosaic was made during the reigns of either Basil I or Leo VI,¹⁰ some historians have sought to be more precise. Oikonomides understood the kneeling pose of the emperor to signify repentance and argued that the whole commemorated Leo VI's penitence for his ecclesiastically forbidden fourth marriage that had produced a male heir at last.¹¹

That argument is implausible for several reasons. If the historical incident and the identity of the emperor had been so important to the meaning, why is the emperor's name not given? Second and more important, the mosaic is not an isolated picture on a wall to be decoded by itself but part of a sequence of prayers, chants, processions, appearances, and relics that make up the high state protocol of an emperor processing from the Great Palace to the Great Church

on major feasts of the year.¹² For the elite of the palace and the church, these rites constitute an ideological restatement of the emperor's authority in peace and war. Integral to those rituals were the appearance of the Cross of Constantine by which he had been victorious at the famous Battle of the Milvian Bridge and the Rod with which Moses had parted the Red Sea for the fleeing Israelites before closing it to drown the pursuing Egyptian army.¹³ When the emperor processed from the Palace to Hagia Sophia through this door and beneath this mosaic, his entourage consisted of large numbers of well-dressed guards bearing "axes covered with gold . . . [and others with] striped breastplates; in their hands they hold spears and shields wholly covered with gold," according to a contemporary observer.¹⁴ To be sure, courtiers, patricians, and clergy in great numbers were also present, but the martial element was a significant part of this and any imperial ritual. The fact that the mosaic and its expression of power does not initially appear warlike to us is our first clue that the visual art of war and power in Byzantium is not as transparent and straightforward as it might appear to be in our world. However, not all periods of Byzantine art are the same in this respect.

In teaching, I have long found it productive to juxtapose the sixth-century Barberini ivory in Paris (fig. 2)¹⁵ with a frontispiece from the early eleventh-century Psalter of Basil II in Venice (fig. 3),¹⁶ for in terms of format and subject matter, this appears to be

12 Dagon, *Emperor and Priest*, 84–95; Nelson, *Hagia Sophia*, 3–13; J. Featherstone, "Emperor and Court," in *OHBS*, 513–14.

13 *De ceremoniis*, 1.1. At that time, the Rod of Moses was kept in the chapel of St. Theodore at the Chrysotriklinos. St. Theodore was one of the principal military saints. See O. Treitinger, *Oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell* (Jena, 1938), 134–35; Dagon, *Emperor and Priest*, 84; H. A. Klein, "Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople," in *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft: Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen: Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. F. A. Bauer, *BYZAS* 5 (2006): 92–93; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. J. F. Haldon, *CFHB* 28 (Vienna, 1990), 245–47.

14 The account of Harun ibn-Yahya: A. Vasiliev, "Harun-Ibn-Yahya and His Description of Constantinople," *SemKond* 5 (1932): 158.

15 D. Gaborit-Chopin in *Byzance, l'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* (Paris, 1992), 63–66, with further literature.

16 A. Cutler, "The Psalter of Basil II," *ArtV* 30 (1976): 9–19 and 31 (1977): 9–15; idem, *The Aristocratic Psalters in Byzantium* (Paris, 1984), 115–19.

7 (Paris, 1936). Letter of André Grabar written from Strasbourg on 29 June 1935 to Thomas Whittemore, preserved among his correspondence in the Bibliothèque byzantine, Paris.

8 C. Jolivet-Lévy, "L'image du pouvoir dans l'art byzantin à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne (867–1056)," *Byzantion* 57 (1987): 441–70; G. Dagon, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003).

9 Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, 101.

10 R. Cormack, "Interpreting the Mosaics of S. Sophia at Istanbul," *Art History* 4 (1981): 138–39; N. Oikonomides, "Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia," *DOP* 30 (1976): 154.

11 Oikonomides, "Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic," 151–72.



FIG. 2 Paris, Musée du Louvre, Barberini Ivory (photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)



FIG. 3 Venice, Bibl. Marc. Gr. 17, fol. IIIr, Psalter of Emperor Basil II

an apple-to-apple comparison. Both may be regarded as five-part compositions. For the ivory, this is obvious, because it consists of five separate pieces, one of which is presently lost. The design was favored in the period.¹⁷ Though less overtly demarcated, the miniature is also divided into the same five areas. At the center of both images is an oversized figure of an emperor, size in the Middle Ages always being a measure of importance. The equestrian ruler is unidentified. The armed standing figure, in contrast, is precisely labeled as "Basil the Younger, the faithful emperor of the Romans in Christ," by means of the vertical inscription written in red letters on either side of him.¹⁸ Above each emperor, a bust figure of Christ blesses; to their sides are brought

17 E.g., W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz am Rhein, 1976), 87, 96–97, nos. 125, 142, 145.

18 At the left: Βασίλειος ἐν Χριστῷ πιστ(ός). At the right: βασιλεύς ρωμαίων δ νέος.

various implements; and below groups of peoples pay obeisance. On the ivory, the small figure of Nike (Victory) in the upper right offers a wreath of victory, and at the left an imperial officer offers the emperor a statue of Nike. Below, fecund Ge, the personification of earth, supports the emperor's foot. In the miniature, angels bring Basil a crown and a spear.

What is different, of course, is the action of the emperor. The early Byzantine ruler on a rearing horse imprisons a barbarian behind his long staff. The emperor thrusts the spear down—the point is at the bottom—so that this is a menacing gesture. The relief of the central panel is cut deeper than other sections to emphasize the physical but also economic power of the emperor. Relief of this depth is only possible from a large, thick, and thus expensive tusk, as Anthony Cutler has discussed.¹⁹ The forelegs of the horse rear up

19 A. Cutler, "Barberiniana: Notes on the Making, Content, and Provenance of Louvre, OA. 9063," in *Tesserae: Festschrift für Josef*

and outward. His body twists around, and the emperor leans back with his mount to implant his spear. His tunic flies behind and then lofts up and down behind the end of the spear and next to the emperor's head to call attention to both. The emperor and his horse are thus the most dynamic and powerful figures on the ivory. Formal and material means unite to dramatize the authority and physical power of the emperor.

Much here follows Roman imperial tradition. The iconography of an equestrian ruler or other high official on a rearing horse has a long lineage.²⁰ What is shown is a scene of victorious triumph: not the battle itself, but the successful outcome, as is typical of late antique art.²¹ The presence of an actual or symbolic Christ above the emperor distinguishes the Barberini ivory from pre-Christian Roman art and conforms to Constantinopolitan usage, as seen, for example, on the prominent base of the now destroyed triumphal column of Arcadius in that city. There in the upper registers, winged victories (or angels) display a cross or chrysogram.²² On the northwest side of the base of the obelisk of Theodosios I in the Hippodrome, kneeling barbarians offer tribute to seated rulers above in a manner that anticipates the bowing figures in foreign dress that occupy the lowest zone of the ivory.²³ Thus, although the Barberini ivory is a work on a small scale—what art history classifies as a minor art—its themes are those of monumental public art, and its high material cost and elite messages bespeak an imperial commission, making it a suitable object of comparison to the portrait of Basil II.

More or less the same iconography appears centuries later at the beginning of the Psalter in Venice: emperor in the center, defeated or submissive peoples below, a symbolic or actual Christ above. But much has also changed, and these variations offer clues to the middle Byzantine art of war. The chief differences involve the relative proportions of the earthly and the heavenly, and

²⁰ Engemann, *JbAC*, Ergänzungsband 18 (1991): 329–39.

²¹ D. E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven, 1992), figs. 185, 254, 359. I thank my colleague for these references. Similar to the Great Trajanic Frieze (*ibid.*, fig. 185), where a barbarian is under the feet of the emperor's horse, the presence of Ge beneath the horse on the ivory adds structural stability to this deeply cut area of the panel.

²² Grabar, *L'empereur* (above, n. 7), 49–50.

²³ Ibid., pls. XIII, XIV.

²⁴ B. Kiilerich, *The Obelisk Base in Constantinople: Court Art and Imperial Ideology* (Rome, 1998), 39, fig. 8.

the persona of the ruler. Now the heavenly zone is larger. No longer confined to the mandorla, Christ extends his hand beyond it and offers a crown to Basil. Rather than supporting the mandorla, the angels interact with the emperor, presenting him the crown and lance. Saints in military attire replace the armed officer at the left. While the emperor is still the largest figure in the composition, he stands passively while he is invested with the attributes and instruments of power. The point of his spear is upward, not down, as befits a warrior at rest. A poem on the facing page describes and interprets what is depicted:

A new wonder is to be seen here:
Christ extends from heaven with his life-bearing
right hand
The crown, the symbol of power,
To Basil, the faithful and mighty Ruler.
Below are the first among the angels.
One, having taken [the crown], has presented it
and joyfully crowns [Basil].
The other, linking power to victories and
Bearing the lance, a weapon which
terrifies enemies,
Places it in the hand of the emperor.
The martyrs fight along with him as a friend,
Throwing down those lying at his feet.²⁴

24 Τὸ θαῦμα καινὸν ὥδε τῶν ὁρωμένων.
Χριστὸς προτείνει δεξιᾷ ζωηφόρῳ
ἔξ οὐρανοῦ τὸ στέμμα, σύμβολον κράτους,
πιστῷ κραταιῷ δεσπότῃ Βασιλείῳ.
κάτοθεν οἱ πρώτιστοι τῶν ἀσωμάτων,
ὁ μὲν λαβὼν ἔγεγκε καὶ χαίρων στέφει,
ὁ δέ, προσάπτων κράτει καὶ τὰς νίκας,
ρομφαίαν, ὅπλον ἐκφοβοῦν ἐναντίους,
φέρων δίδωσι χειρὶ τῇ τοῦ δεσπότου.
οἱ μάρτυρες δὲ συμμαχοῦσιν ὡς φίλῳ,
ρίπτοντες τοὺς ποσὶ προσκεψένους.

Transcription in I. Ševčenko, “The Illuminators of the Menologium of Basil II,” *DOP* 16 (1962): 272, n. 92, with a translation that differs in several respects from mine. For one, he translates ρομφαίαν as sword, but P. Stephenson in *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer* (New York, 2003), 53, n. 12, has pointed out that the word may also refer to a spear or lance, which is surely its meaning in this context.²⁵ There is yet another translation in C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Burlington, VT, 2003), 277. The text is reproduced in *El “Menologio de Basilio II,” Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Gr. 1613: Libro de estudios con ocasión de la edición facsmil*, ed. F. d'Aiuto (Madrid, 2008), fig. II.2.2.

The order is, top down, Christ extending the crown, then angels carrying a crown and a spear to Basil. At the sides are six interlinked portraits of saints displayed as if there were actual icons on the walls. These martyrs are Basil's allies in battle. The language is appropriate to the image, because the saints are dressed similarly to the emperor. They fight with the emperor, but it is the saints, not the emperor, who throw down "those lying at his feet." Ihor Ševčenko and most others insert the word "enemies" into that last line, but, as Paul Stevenson noted, there is no explicit repetition of this term from a preceding verse.²⁵ Stevenson's remarks are part of a larger thesis that Basil did not receive his martial reputation as Bulgar-Slayer until the twelfth century,²⁶ and in making that argument—successfully in my opinion—he relies on a basic study of Cutler about this miniature. Cutler overturned a decades-old tradition, solidified by Grabar's seminal book,²⁷ that the miniature commemorated Basil's decisive victory over the Bulgarians in 1017 and the subsequent celebration in Constantinople.²⁸ That notion still persists, as Stevenson notes.²⁹ Cutler distinguished between Basil's actual triumph in the capital and what is shown in the manuscript. Because there is nothing specifically Bulgarian about the people at the emperor's feet, Cutler suggested that the miniature represented "a generalized image of the emperor's God-given authority."³⁰

Images of equestrian emperors are rare in the middle Byzantine period, but one that should be brought into the discussion is the approximately contemporary silk of Bishop Gunther in Bamberg (fig. 4). The center of this large textile, originally 2.6 meters high, depicts an emperor riding a white horse and holding a labarum. Two female personifications of cities offer him different types of crowns. As before, Grabar established the dominant interpretation, arguing that this object also

commemorated Basil II's victory over the Bulgarians.³¹ More recently, Günter Prinzing has proposed a clever alternative: the triumph of John I Tzimiskes in 971.³² While there are reasons to favor each interpretation, the object itself, like the mosaic over the imperial door and the portrait in the Venice Psalter, does not provide sufficient clues to resolve the matter, which I suggest is the intended and preferred message. In these and other examples, Byzantine art creates general or universal meanings that were contextualized at particular ceremonies.³³ Thus objects were adaptable, so that such silks could be reemployed again and again, or, if no longer needed, given to a visiting dignitary and put to new uses.

But what does such an object tell us about a visual art of war? Once more compared to the Barberini ivory, the later rider is less active, and his horse has no torsion. Although the emperor rides "Western style," that is, with his legs astride the horse and the one visible foot in a stirrup, the upper part of his body is frontal. His left hand holds the horse's reins. With the tips of the fingers of his right hand, the emperor gently clasps the shaft of the imperial labarum. It rises majestically above the emperor's gilded and jeweled halo and establishes a more insistent and calming vertical axis than the corresponding lance on the ivory, because the spear is equal in height to the emperor, the more dominant and dynamic figure. The two women at the sides balance each other as perhaps once did the missing figure of the Barberini panel, but on the silk all figures are separate, distinct, and absorbed by the patterned ground of stylized flower petals that may be a reference to the flowers that were strewn along the processional routes of imperial triumphs.³⁴ The slow visual cadence of solemn procession depicted on the Bamberg silk contrasts with the dynamism, multiple rhythms, and *horror vacui* of the early Byzantine ivory. If the broad decorative borders of the silk are included in the visual analysis, the differ-

25 Ševčenko, "Illuminators," 272; Stevenson, *Legend of Basil*, 53.

26 Stevenson, *Legend of Basil*, 81–96.

27 Grabar, *L'empereur* (above, n. 7), 86–87.

28 Cutler, "Psalter" (1977), 9–15.

29 Stevenson, *Legend of Basil*, 53.

30 Cutler, "Psalter" (1977), 12. This image of a pious emperor represents a theory of imperial power that may or may not correspond with historical reality but does differ from what Michael Psellos presents, according to A. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia* (Boston, 1999), 51–61.

31 Grabar, *L'empereur*, 51–53.

32 G. Prinzing, "Das Bamberger Gunthertuch in neuer Sicht," *BSI* 54 (1993): 218–31; Stevenson, *Legend of Basil*, 62–65.

33 On the problem more generally of the over-interpretation of Byzantine art, see the comments of R. Cormack, "Patronage and New Programs of Byzantine Iconography," in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers* (Washington, DC, 1986), 620–22; and A. Cutler, "Sacred and Profane: The Locus of the Political in Middle Byzantine Art," *Milon* 3 (1995): 319–20.

34 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three Treatises*, ed. Haldon, 140–41. I thank Henry Maguire for this suggestion.

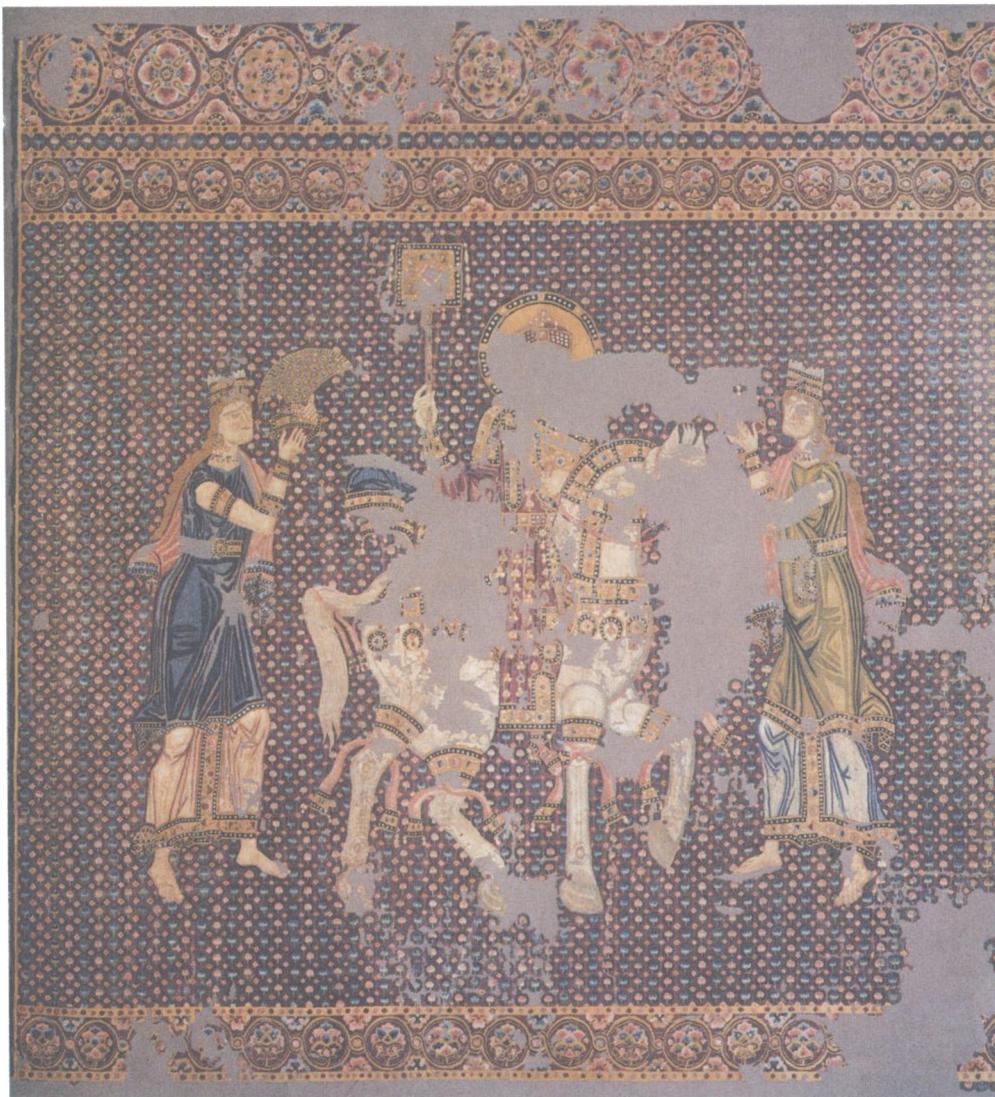


FIG. 4
Bamberg Cathedral,
Silk of Bishop
Gunther (photo:
Diözesanmuseum,
Bamberg)

ence between the stately stasis of silk and the vibrant vitalities of the ivory is greater still.

To what extent are these distinctions between the early and middle Byzantine imperial representations due to the paramount mechanism that determined what survived of Byzantine art, imperial or otherwise, namely, the church? After all, the portrait of Basil II is to be found in a religious manuscript that would be more likely appreciated by ecclesiastical audiences, and the Bamberg silk owes its existence to the fact that Bishop Gunther, who died in 1065, obtained it on a trip to Constantinople and was then buried with it at

the cathedral.³⁵ Moreover, the back of the Barberini ivory lists ecclesiastical names that place it in Gaul in the seventh century. The ivory next surfaces in the seventeenth century in the possession of the French antiquarian Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, who gave it to Cardinal Francesco Barberini in Rome.³⁶

While the same reception history applies to both early and middle Byzantine imperial art, so presumably the observed patterns do not depend upon that reception, nonetheless the suspicion lingers. One solution to

35 Prinzing, "Das Bamberger Gunthertuch," 219.

36 Gaborit-Chopin in *Byzance* (above, n. 15), 63; Cutler, "Barberiniana" (above, n. 19), 331, n. 10 with further literature.



FIG. 5 Miliaresion of Constantine IX, obverse. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Thomas Whittemore, 1951.31.4.1581



FIG. 6 Solidus of Justinian, obverse (photo: Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)

the problem is to look at coinage, a body of evidence more independent of the church, because coins are often found, if not often enough, in hoards or other archaeological contexts. There, a pose similar to that of Basil II in the Psalter does appear a few decades after Basil's reign on silver coins of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055) (fig. 5).³⁷ The emperor, in military dress, holds a tall cross with his right hand and rests his left on a sheathed sword. Like Basil II, Constantine Monomachos stands confidently but statically. In the miniature, Basil is the passive recipient of divine power. On the coin, Constantine Monomachos prays for aid to the orant Virgin on the other side of the coin in the words of an inscription appearing on both sides of the coin: "O Lady, preserve// the pious Monomachos."³⁸ Such coinage, even in its militant variant in the case of the Monomachos coin, contrasts with that of the early Byzantine period, as seen, for example, in issues of Anastasios I (491–518) and Justinian I (527–565) (fig. 6).³⁹ In these bust-length portraits, the emperors turn their heads slightly to the right and rest a spear on their

right shoulders so that its point is clearly visible behind their heads on the right side of the coin. The presence of the spear, as if resting momentarily before use, makes this pose more aggressive and militant than that of Constantine Monomachos with his sheathed sword.

Brandishing an uncovered weapon is foreign to post-Iconoclastic coinage with one famous exception in the brief reign of Isaac I Komnenos (1057–1059), whose coinage generally has a militaristic character. One series (fig. 7) is a variant on that of Constantine IX, except that Isaac stands, dressed also in military attire, and holds the labarum, a secular symbol of power, instead of a cross. A second issue was controversial (fig. 8). In this type, Isaac pins the hilt of a drawn sword against his right lapel, while his left hand rakishly projects the scabbard out to the side. While said to be "wholly new,"⁴⁰ this type has partial antecedents. Earlier emperors had held a scepter or labarum in the position of the sword,⁴¹ but an unsheathed weapon displayed so prominently was indeed unprecedented, and it did not go without notice. Contemporaries read it as an act of pride on his part, implying that Isaac's successes

37 *DOC* 3.2:745–46, pl. LIX.

38 Δέσποινα σώζοις // εύσεβη Μονομάχον. *Ibid.*, 736.

39 *DOC* 1: pls. I, XIII.

40 *DOC* 3.2:760.

41 Coins of Constantine VIII and IX: *ibid.*, LVI, LVIII–LIX.



FIG. 7 Histamenon of Isaac I, obverse with sheathed sword (photo: Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)



FIG. 8 Histamenon of Isaac I, obverse with drawn sword. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Thomas Whittemore, 1951.31.4.1590

were due to his personal powers, not the will of God.⁴² In more private spheres, however, sword-brandishing images of emperors apparently were tolerated. Paul Magdalino has called attention to the decoration of the now destroyed bath of Leo VI in the Great Palace in Constantinople that included the figure of an emperor holding a sword, but in exactly what manner this brief description does not make clear.⁴³ That is not the case with a description of the emperor Isaac II (1185–1195; 1203–1204), "portrayed in a picture on horseback with his crown and a naked sword."⁴⁴

However, within the official imagery of imperial coins, Isaac's innovation was not repeated, and more irenic poses prevailed throughout the middle and late Byzantine periods. Even successful emperor-generals, such as the tenth-century emperor John I

Tzimiskes, portrayed themselves stationary, peaceful, and dependent upon external aid. On the reverse of John Tzimiskes' coinage, for example, Mary places her hand on the emperor's crown and a hand of God reaches toward the emperor's head to signify divine legitimization.⁴⁵ John also had his bust portrait placed at the center of a cross (fig. 9) on his silver miliarense, an innovation begun by Romanos I and continued by Nikephoros II.⁴⁶ The iconography does not survive John I, although the cross itself remains important. John's successors, Basil II and his brother Constantine VIII, are depicted holding a large patriarchal cross between them.⁴⁷

Whereas early Byzantine emperors introduced the cross to the reverse of coins on which their portraits occupied the other side, tenth-century emperors draw the association closer. On coins of this period, the portrait-within-in-a-cross fuses emperor and cross in a design that had a larger role in society. It appears as well on an ivory panel at Dumbarton Oaks, with a medallion of an emperor gesturing to the right and

42 Zonaras, 18.4 (Bonn ed., III, 1897, 666); Skylitzes Continuatus, ed. E. Th. Tsolakis, *H Συνέχεια τῆς χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτζη (Ioannes Skylitzes Continuatus)* (Thessalonike, 1968), 103; *DOC* 3.2: 759–60.

43 P. Magdalino, "The Bath of Leo the Wise and the 'Macedonian Renaissance' Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial, Ideology," *DOP* 42 (1988): 104, 116, 133–36.

44 P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, "The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century," *ByzF* 8 (1982): 154.

45 *DOC* 3.2:589–90, pl. XLII.

46 Ibid., 537, 585, 596.

47 Ibid., pl. XLV.



FIG. 9 Miliarense of John I Tzimiskes, obverse (photo: Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)

toward a matching panel now in Gotha that has a frontal Pantokrator image of Christ in the same position. These ivories have been reasonably assigned to the mid-tenth century.⁴⁸ There is nothing ostensibly martial about this particular imperial image, for such is the utility and the virtue of such polyvalent imperial imagery. Nonetheless, this is a period in iconographic innovation in regard to the cross and war, and military values were suggested in other contexts.

Already the name of Emperor Basil I had appeared on a cross in a small lectionary in Naples, according to Kurt Weitzmann. This deluxe manuscript, written in gold on purple parchment, contains only nineteen feasts of the church year instead of readings for either the Saturdays and Sundays or all the days of the year. The luxurious materials and the special selection of feasts suggest an elite patron, as does the cross at the beginning on which is written BACIAEIOY KPATOC. The inscription illustrates the elision between the imperial and the religious. The genitive βασιλείου is ambiguous, because it can refer either to the substantive βασίλειον, *kingdom*, or to the personal name Βασίλειος, Basil. Weitzmann sought the opinion

48 *DOCat* 3:55–58, pl. XXXII.

of the noted historian Franz Dölger, who chose the former option.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Weitzmann thought that other aspects of the manuscript argued for an imperial patron, a position that Grabar endorsed, and it has more to recommend it.⁵⁰

The son of Basil I, the emperor Alexander, placed a bust of Christ in the center of the cross on a silver issue, one of a number of numismatic innovations introduced by an emperor who ruled for only slightly more than a year. Subsequently, Romanos I and successors altered this new iconographic type and replaced the image of Christ with their own portraits. The miliarense of Alexander bore the legend “Jesus Christ conquers,” a phrase that had been introduced by Emperor Leo III in the eighth century and continued for centuries thereafter.⁵¹ The coins of Romanos I and later emperors maintained the same legend, thus giving this iconography of the emperor inside a cross a militant association. By extension, a similar meaning may apply to the diptych now divided between Washington and Gotha.⁵²

As noted earlier, the Cross of Constantine played an important role in imperial ceremony, according to the mid-century Book of Ceremonies, and a variety of gilded and jeweled crosses were kept in the palace.⁵³ Traditionally one such cross in the Lavra Monastery on Mt. Athos has been credited to the generosity of Nikephoros Phokas, the monastery’s founder (figs. 10

49 K. Weitzmann, “Ein kaiserliches Lektionar einer byzantinischen Hofschule,” in *Festschrift Karl M. Swoboda* (Vienna, 1959), 317; idem, *Die byzantinische Buchmalerei des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts, Addenda und Appendix* (Vienna, 1996), 76; A. Iacobini, “De Basilio I a Basilio II: Marcas e imágenes de comitentes en la producción libraria constantinopolitana de época macedonia,” in *Menologio de Basilio II* (above, n. 24), 199–200.

50 A. Grabar, “La précieuse croix de la Lavra de Saint-Athanase au Mont Athos,” *CahArch* 19 (1969): 112–13. In correspondence, Dr. Alice-Mary Talbot suggested that the more common rendering of *kingdom* would be βασιλεία. This is particularly true in religious contexts. Cf. the length of discussions of βασιλείον and βασιλεία in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1978), 289–92. On the phrase βασιλέων κράτος, see A. Frolov, “Une inscription bulgare inédite,” *RES* 21 (1944): 102–3.

51 *DOC* 3.2:525; 3.1:182–83. On the phrase see A. Frolov, “IC XC NIKA,” *BSI* 17 (1956): 98–113.

52 Western medieval examples are surveyed by J. Deér, “Das Kaiserbild im Kreuz: Ein Beitrag zur politischen Theologie des frühen Mittelalters,” *Schweizer Beiträge zur Allgemeinen Geschichte* 13 (1955): 48–110.

53 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three Treatises*, ed. Haldon, 245–47.

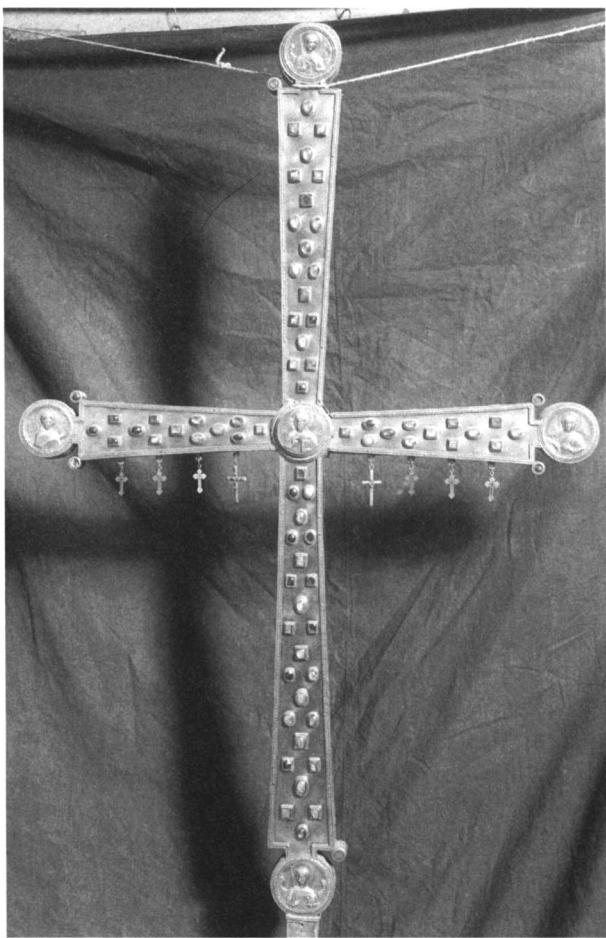


FIG. 10 Mt. Athos, Lavra Monastery, Processional Cross, front (photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

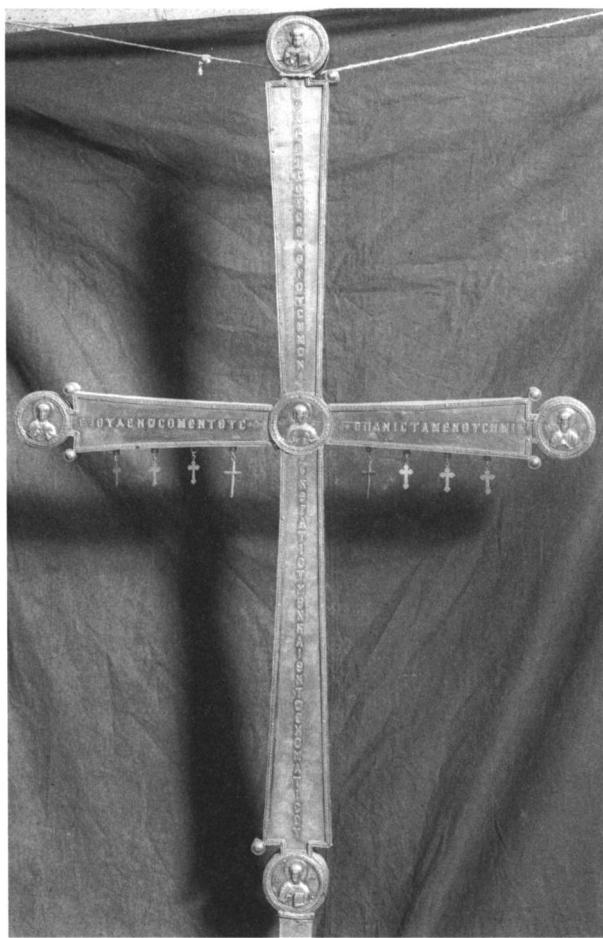


FIG. 11 Mt. Athos, Lavra Monastery, Processional Cross, back (photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

and 11).⁵⁴ Like the lectionary, it too blurs boundaries between the imperial and the religious. Now placed on the main altar, this large, handsome processional cross of tenth-century date is decorated on the front and back with medallions of holy figures in the center and at the ends of the cross arms. The front side (fig. 10) has medallions of the archangels Michael and Gabriel at the top and bottom, and on the horizontal axis, the *Deësis* group of John the Baptist (right) and Mary (left) flanking Christ in the center. At the extremities of the cross arms on the back (fig. 11) are Peter (left), Paul

(right), St. Gregory of Nazianzos (top), and St. John Chrysostom (bottom); at the center is the Virgin with her hands held upright before her chest. A number of precious stones embellish the front, the public face of the cross. A verse from Psalm 43 (44):5 is inscribed on the back:

In thee will we throw down our enemies,
And in thy name will we bring to naught those
that rise up against us.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Grabar, "Croix de la Lavra," 105. On Nikephoros and the Lavra, see the Typikon of St. Athanasios, trans. G. Dennis in *BMFD* 1:250–54.

⁵⁵ Ἐν τοῖς τοὺς ἔχθροὺς ἡμῶν / κερατιοῦμεν καὶ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου / ἐξουδενώσομεν τοὺς / ἐπανισταμένους ἡμῖν. Grabar, "Croix de la Lavra," 101.

In Greek, the verse is separated into four sections for the four cross arms; the English translation cannot be so easily divided. The first English line and part of the second fill the vertical parts of the cross; the remainder fits into the two sections of the horizontal crossbar.

The inscription is well designed for this space and context. The beholder reads the inscription down the vertical of the cross and in so doing reinforces the sense of the first line—the throwing down of the enemies. However, the relation of text and beholder is yet more complex. In general, inscriptions on medieval ceremonial objects need to be interpreted differently from word/image combinations in our world. We first read an inscription as if it were a caption or label explaining something in or on an object and hence as a text that is inwardly directed. Inscriptions on medieval ceremonial objects, as Seeta Chaganti has developed for Western medieval reliquaries, were more often oriented outwardly toward the reader/viewer.⁵⁶ Such objects were encountered, not in isolation as in today's museums or on the pages of books, but in procession or in other ritual uses. For objects with images, a favored linguistic mode was the dialogic, as seen in this Psalm verse.⁵⁷ The first and second person pronouns prevent the inscription from being taken as a neutral, third person caption of our world and render it a prayer on behalf of the believer who pronounces these words.

To whom is the prayer directed; that is, who is the “thee?” Visually there are two possibilities: the central medallion at the center of either the front or the back of the cross. Since the Virgin on the back is enveloped by the inscription, one might first suppose her to be its visual referent and the divine safeguard against enemies. She had long played a similar role in Byzantine culture. Since the sixth century, the Theotokos had been the protectress of Constantinople.⁵⁸ Her icon had saved the city from the Avars and the Persians in the siege of 626.⁵⁹ The efficacy of the visual representations of the Theotokos was affirmed by the triumphal entry

of Emperor John I Tzimiskes into Constantinople in 971. When presented with a special chariot brought forth for him to use for the procession, the emperor instead gave the honor to an icon of the Virgin and followed on horseback.⁶⁰ Icons of the Virgin were taken into battle to ensure the safety of the troops and the success of the outcome. Heraclius attached icons of Mary to the masts of his battleships in the seventh century.⁶¹ In 989, Basil II confronted the troops of the rebel Bardas Phokas with a sword in his right hand. “With his left hand he held the icon of the Mother of the Word close to his chest, making it his surest defense against the unrestrained charge of his enemy. . . .”⁶² The less faithful might have preferred a sturdy shield, and doubts have been cast on Basil’s sole reliance upon an icon defense,⁶³ but the social, religious, and rhetorical power of icons is not to be denied.

Icons of the Virgin thus constitute an important subset of the Byzantine art of war. Since Bissara Pentcheva devoted a chapter of her recent book to images of the Theotokos and imperial power “in the context of war,”⁶⁴ this topic will not be discussed further other than to conclude that the Virgin may be the intended referent of the inscription on the back of the Lavra cross. However, her gesture there suggests that the chain of reference does not stop with her. Her open hands are symmetrically centered before her chest, fingers poised vertically, the tips curved in slightly. The pose is best described as prayerful and compares with other orant figures such as a Virgin on an enameled quatrefoil in Dumbarton Oaks attributed to the second half of the tenth century.⁶⁵ There the half-length

60 Leo the Deacon, 9.12, CSHB (Bonn ed., 1828, 158); trans. A.-M. Talbot and D. F. Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC, 2005), 200–201; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 53–54; M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (New York, 1986), 171–74.

61 E. Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” *DOP* 8 (1954): 111–12.

62 Translation from Kaldellis, *Argument of Chronographia*, 62; Psellos, *Chronographia* 1.16; E. Renaud, *Chronographie, ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance (976–1077)*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1926), 10; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 54–55, 75.

63 Kaldellis, *Argument of Chronographia*, 62–66.

64 Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 61–103.

65 S. R. Zwirn, *DOCat*, 2nd ed., 2:213–15. A similar orant Virgin appears as well on the 10th-century Romanos chalice in the Treasury of San Marco—see K. Wessel, *Byzantine Enamels from the 5th to the*

56 *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance* (New York, 2008), 1–45.

57 More generally on the dialogic, see R. S. Nelson, “The Discourse of Icons, Then and Now,” *Art History* 12 (1989): 144–57.

58 A. Cameron, “The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople: A City Finds Its Symbol,” *JTS* 29 (1978): 79–108.

59 B. V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006), 37–59.

figure of Mary raises her hands in a similar gesture. This image is the reverse side of an enamel of Christ, who gestures and holds a closed book in a manner similar to the Jesus in the central medallion on the front side of the Lavra cross. The same pairing of Christ with book and orant Virgin appears on the front and back sides of book covers of tenth-century date in Venice.⁶⁶ In these examples, the orant pose connects the mother to her son, because it signifies speech—in this case prayer to him on behalf of believers.

On the cross, Mary is at the center of the Psalmist’s proclamation, which she advances by her gesture. She pleads and affirms what the beholder has read and voiced in the inscription. The referent of Mary’s prayer must be the Christ on the front of the cross. He is at the center of the prayer group, the so-called *Déesis* that includes as the first figure another Virgin. She and John the Baptist gesture and pray toward Jesus on behalf of humankind. The Baptist also turns his head toward Jesus, but Mary’s gaze, like her son’s, is outward to engage the beholder, as she is similarly posed on the back. The cross, therefore, provides two referents for the inscription, the Virgin first and then Christ and two images at its center to fix the reading and visualization of the text in space. By an exegetical process that long before had Christianized the Psalms, Christ is the one who defeats enemies and puts down uprisings. This is the message that the cross proclaims as a religious or a military standard.

As an altar cross, the jeweled side, here termed the front, would be directed to the congregation in the naos, and the object has been thus photographed at the monastery.⁶⁷ The inscription then faces the apse wall and the priests behind the cross. When used as a processional cross, the Psalm verse is best read by the person carrying the cross and directed to those that follow. Crosses such as these had multiple roles, both religious and secular, to use terms of our world that did not apply to theirs. Imperial processions and military triumphs included crosses of various sorts. The afore-

mentioned description of the imperial entourage proceeding to Hagia Sophia in the later ninth century, for example, included numerous eunuchs “wearing white Khorasan clothes of half silk . . . [and holding] golden crosses.”⁶⁸ When the emperor went on campaign, according to Constantine VII, a ceremonial procession included “a *signophoros* bearing a golden, bejeweled cross” and other officials who preceded the emperor.⁶⁹ In a religious procession, the higher clergy would also follow the cross. In this case, visual and verbal messages inscribed on the back of the cross are not less important than those on the front, for the higher clergy, officials, and emperor follow the cross. The ambiguity of the Lavra cross’s inscription permits it to function in religious and military contexts, no matter if it were made for palace or monastery.⁷⁰ Its twin themes of throwing down enemies and subduing uprisings recall the epigram that accompanied the portrait of Basil II in his Psalter and resemble messages found on contemporary reliquaries of the True Cross.

Ever since Constantine’s vision of a cross before his decisive victory at the Milvian Bridge, crosses, including parts of the True Cross, had been implements of war and symbols of victory.⁷¹ They were carried into battle, and processional crosses were an obligatory part of imperial triumphs upon return to Constantinople.⁷² As part of standard imperial protocol, people in the Hippodrome proclaimed that by the cross the emperor would destroy all nations.⁷³ In one exhortation before battle, Constantine VII assured his troops that the cross would protect them.⁷⁴ In another, he mentioned

68 Vasiliev, “Harun-ibn-Yahya” (above, n. 14), 158.

69 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three Treatises*, ed. Haldon, 124–25.

70 Cf. in this respect a cross in Geneva made for Leo Phokas, the brother of Nikephoros II Phokas. It is dedicated to St. Michael as “the commander of the armies.” See L. Bouras, “The Reliquary Cross of Leo *Domestikos tes Dyses*,” in *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, ed. M. Mullett and R. Scott (Birmingham, 1981), 179–87.

71 Grabar, *L’empereur*, 32–39 (above, n. 7); J. Gagé, “Σταυρὸς νικοποιός: La victoire impériale dans l’empire chrétien,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 13 (1933): 370–400.

72 In general, see J. Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World 565–1204* (New York, 1999), 22; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three Treatises*, ed. Haldon, 245–47.

73 *Book of Ceremonies*, 2:78: A. Vogt, ed., *Le livre des cérémonies*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1967), 131. I thank Henry Maguire for this reference.

74 H. Ahrweiler, “Un discours inédit de Constantin VII Porphyrogénète,” *TM* 2 (1967): 398; E. McGeer, “Two Military Orations

13th Century (Greenwich, CT, 1967), fig. 19a—and on 10th-century seals and the cross of Adrianople of the same period; see L. Bouras, *The Cross of Adrianople: A Silver Processional Cross of the Middle Byzantine Period* (Athens, 1979), 26.

66 Wessel, *Byzantine Enamels*, figs. 27a,b.

67 *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Milan, 2000), fig. 137.

the holy water that he had sent them. Rendered holy by contact with relics of the True Cross and the Passion, this substance was used to anoint the soldiers.⁷⁵ Crosses used as imperial battle standards were sometimes lost to the enemy, and Leo the Deacon describes how when Nikephoros II Phokas captured Tarsos, he got back “the cross-standards made of gold and precious stones that the Tarsians had seized in various battles” with the Romans. During his subsequent triumph in the capital, Nikephoros placed the recovered crosses on the altar of Hagia Sophia.⁷⁶

The actual and symbolic art of war in Byzantium thus includes crosses, the importance of which is attested by several inscribed tenth-century reliquaries of the True Cross. The most elaborate is the famed Staurotheke in Limburg an der Lahn.⁷⁷ This elaborately enameled reliquary was the creation of the Proedros Basil, the illegitimate son of the Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos, sometime between his receipt of this title in 963 and his exile in 985 by the emperor Basil II. Inside the container that the Proedros Basil had made is the relic itself, encased in a metal frame. Inscribed on its back are verses that name the emperors Constantine and Romanos, who most likely are Constantine VII and Romanos I (fig. 12).⁷⁸ In recent years, the epigram has been studied by Johannes Koder, Nancy Ševčenko, Bissera Pentcheva, Andreas Rhoby, and others⁷⁹ and translated by Jeffrey Featherstone, as follows:

of Constantine VII,” in *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations; Texts and Translations Dedicated to the Memory of Nicolas Oikonomides*, ed. J. W. Nesbitt (Boston, 2003), 118.

⁷⁵ McGeer, “Two Military Orations,” 133–34; S. Mergalii-Sahas, “Byzantine Emperors and Holy Relics: Use and Misuse of Sanctity of Authority,” *JÖB* 51 (2001): 50–51.

⁷⁶ Leo the Deacon, 4.4 (Bonn ed., 61); Talbot and Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon* (above, n. 60), 109.

⁷⁷ Most recently see H. A. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz: Die Geschichte einer Reliquie und ihrer künstlerischen Fassung in Byzanz und im Abendland* (Wiesbaden, 2004), 105–12; idem, “Die Limburger Staurothek und der Kreuzkult in Jerusalem und Konstantinopel,” in *Im Zeichen des Kreuzes: Die Limburger Staurothek und ihre Geschichte*, ed. A. Heuser and M. T. Kloft (Regensburg, 2009), 13–30; A. Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst* (Vienna, 2010), 163–69.

⁷⁸ A. Frolow, *La relique de la Vraie Croix: Recherches sur le développement d'un culte* (Paris, 1961), 235–36.

⁷⁹ J. Koder, “Zu den Versinschriften der Limburger Staurothek,” *Archiv für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 37 (1985): 11–31; idem, “Ο Κωνσταντίνος Πορφυργέννητος καὶ ἡ σταυροθήκη τοῦ

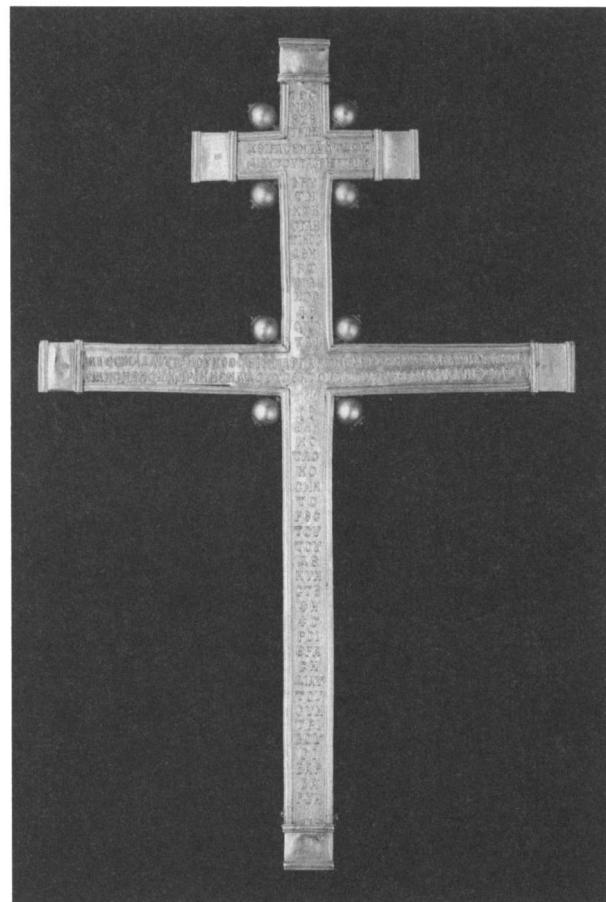


FIG. 12 Limburg an der Lahn, Staurothek, back of frame of True Cross relic (photo: Dom- und Diözesanmuseum, Limburg)

God stretched out his hands upon the wood,
Gushing forth through it the energies of life;
Constantine and Romanos the emperors
Have with the addition of radiant stones
and pearls
Made this same [a thing] full of wonder.

Λιμπουργκ,” in *Ο Κωνσταντίνος Ζ' Πορφυργέννητος καὶ ἡ Εποχή του* (Athens, 1989), 165–84; L. Boura, “Ο Βασίλειος Λεκατηνός παραγγελιοδότης ἔργων τέχνης,” in *ibid.*, 397–434; N. P. Ševčenko, “The Limburg Staurothek and Its Relics,” in *Θυματα στη μνήμη τῆς Αασκαρίνας Μπούρα* (Athens, 1994), 289; B. Pentcheva, “Containers of Power: Eunuchs and Reliquaries in Byzantium,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 51 (Spring, 2007): 108–20; Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 166–69.

And upon it Christ, who formerly smashed the gates of Hell,
Returned the dead to life;
The crowned ones, who have now adorned it,
Crush the impudence of the barbarians with it.⁸⁰

The punctuation in the English and Greek is not found in the original uncials, but the presence of *kai* at the beginning of the second verse and the different theme in each section suggest a conceptual break. Each verse is further subdivided into two parts. The first stanza says that Christ stretched out his hands on this wood and his blood poured out on it, and that the emperors Constantine and Romanos added jewels and stones and made this wondrous object. In the second verse, we read that upon it Christ, who once broke down the gates of hell, resurrected the dead, and that now the emperors, who embellished it, use it to crush barbarians.

In the first stanza, because divine energies have suffused the wood, it has acquired life-giving properties. The emperors have, in effect, gilded the lily. What the inscription stresses, however, is the relationship of the action of God and that of the emperors. This is why their names in the nominative case begin lines one and three. The second stanza works from what has been described as the divinatory or medical logic of antiquity, an important motivation for logical constructions of word and image in Byzantium.⁸¹ That logic is as follows: because A, then B. This is not a language-derived semiotics, the dominant model that prevailed in the West until recently and the one that undergirds the systems of Saussure, structuralism, and even post-structuralism.⁸² Even though the epigram is verbal, the object it references is a nonverbal sign that is more pow-

80 Θ(εδ)ς μὲν ἔξετεινε χεῖρας ἐν ξύλῳ / ζωῆς δὶ' αὐτοῦ τὰς ἐνεργείας βρύων / Κωνσταντίνος δὲ κ(αὶ) 'Ρωμανὸς δεσπόται / λίθων διαυγῶν συνθέσει καὶ μαργάρων / ἔδειξαν αὐτὸ θαύματος πεπλησμένον. / Κ(αὶ) πρὶν μὲν Ἀιδου X(ριστὸς) ἐν τούτῳ πύλας / θραύσας ἀνεζώσε τοὺς τεθηκότας, / κοσμήτορες τούτου δὲ νῦν στεφηφόροι / θράση δὶ' αὐτοῦ συντρίβουσι βαρβάρων. Text from Koder, “*Versinschriften*,” 12; translation from Ševčenko, “Limburg Staurothek,” 289.

81 R. S. Nelson, “Byzantine Art vs. Western Medieval Art,” in *Byzance et le monde extérieur: Contacts, relations, échanges*, ed. M. Balard et al. (Paris, 2005), 255–70.

82 G. Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity* (Bloomington, 1993), xiii–xvi.

erful than words. Another system of logic governs such signs. In that realm, A implies B; A does not equal B. This is the only way to understand the linkage between Christ’s smashing the gates of hell in the past and the emperors’ crushing barbarians in the present. The association of the Crucifixion and Resurrection with military victory may not be obvious to us, but that relationship was important to the general or emperor holding or looking at this cross and was emphasized verbally by the phonic similarity of the words that begin the second and fourth lines of that stanza, θραύσας, *smashing*, and θράση, *impudence*.

The structure of these relationships in the verses of the Staurotheke can be represented in one of two ways:

I. Christ bleeding : emperors decorating ::
Christ resurrecting : emperors crushing

II. Christ bleeding : emperors decorating ::
Christ smashing : emperors crushing

Christ bleeding on the wood and the emperors decorating the wood (verse one) equal Christ returning the dead to life and the emperors crushing barbarians (verse two). The second stanza is more complicated, however. The primary intention is not the message of the main verbs, Christ resurrecting and the emperors crushing, but Christ smashing and the emperors crushing, my second alternative. In the first stanza, the verbs are in the past tense. However, in the second stanza, Christ’s action is in the past tense, but that of the emperors is in the present. This tense change furthers the logic of implication. Because of the past event, the present action—the defeat of the barbarians—will take place.

Visually the names of the two emperors are clearly legible on the vertical shaft above the cross bar, and the operative last line about the crushing of the barbarians closes off that vertical bar. As in the Barberini ivory or the Venice Psalter miniature, the barbarians are relegated to the lowest section, their standard position for centuries in Roman iconography, and that tradition continues in a related inscription on another reliquary of the True Cross in Cortona, also from the later tenth century (figs. 13 and 14).⁸³ Made of ivory,

83 Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, *Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 2:48–49, pl. 30; A. Guillou, “Deux ivoires constantinopolitains datés du IX^e et X^e siècle,” in *Byzance et les Slaves*:



FIG. 13 Cortona, Reliquary of True Cross, ivory, front
(photo: Holger A. Klein)

this reliquary contains a small fragment of the Cross

Études de civilisation: Mélanges Ivan Dujčev (Paris, 1979), 209–11; Cutler, “Sacred and Profane” (above, n. 33), 326–27; A. Cutler, *The Hand of the Master: Craftsmanship, Ivory, and Society in Byzantium (9th–11th Centuries)* (Princeton, 1994), 20–21, 213–15, pls. I–II in color; Oikonomides, “Holy War” (above, n. 5), 77–86; H. Klein, “Die Staurothek von Cortona im Kontext mittelbyzantinischer Kreuzreliquiarproduktion,” in *Byzantinische Elfenbeine im Diskurs*, ed. G. Bühl, A. Cutler, and A. Effenberger, *Spätantike, frühes Christentum, Byzanz*, vol. 2, *Studien und Perspektiven* 24 (Wiesbaden, 2009), 167–90; Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 331–34.

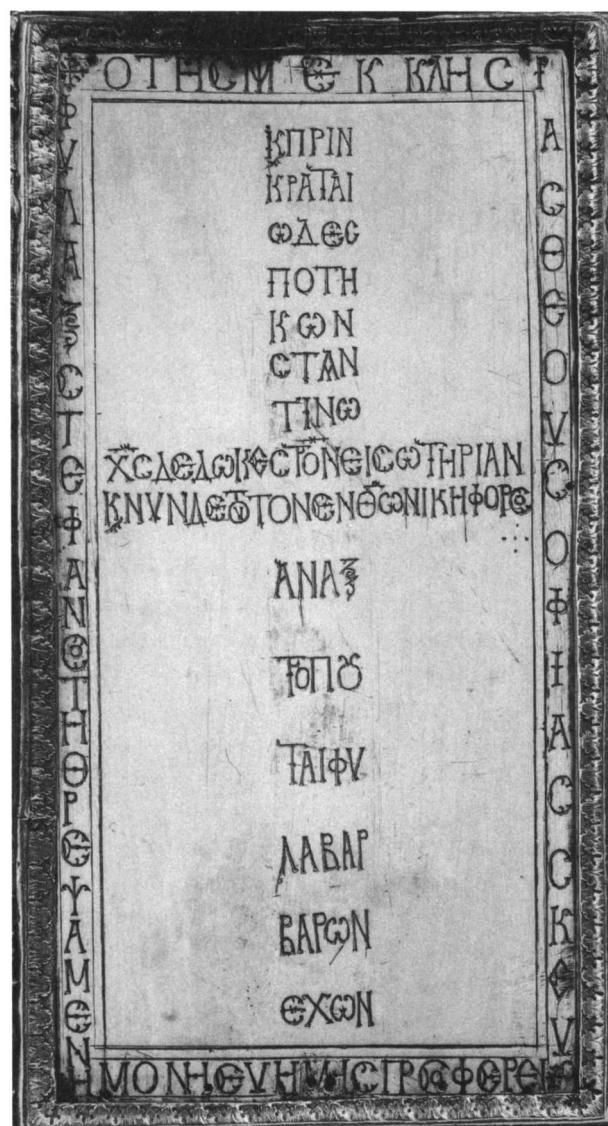


FIG. 14 Cortona, Reliquary of True Cross, ivory, back
(photo: Holger A. Klein)

encased behind a metal screen. Its main side presents a greater Deësis program similar to that of the Lavra cross (fig. 10), with other holy figures added. At the top (fig. 13) are three medallions with the archangels Gabriel and Michael turning to Christ in the center; standing below in the upper quadrants of the field are Mary and John the Baptist, standard for a Deësis, and in the lower sections St. Stephen and St. John, who is traditionally shown at the Crucifixion. At the bottom of the plaque and symmetrical with the upper row are three medallions. The emperor Constantine is in the center and on axis with Christ above; to the left is his

mother Helena, who discovered the cross; and at the right is Longinus, the Roman centurion who pierced Jesus's side at the Crucifixion but also recognized his divinity. Constantine, saint and emperor, wears full imperial dress and carries a cross staff. His mother is dressed as an Augusta.

On the back of the ivory and the relic are two inscriptions (fig. 14). One in prose identifies the patron as Stephanos, which explains why his name saint appears on the opposite side.⁸⁴ Stephanos was the skeuophylax of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and the inscription states that he gives the reliquary to "his monastery of origin." The second text, an epigram of four verses, is written in the form of a cross and proclaims an imperial ideology of the cross similar to the Limburg relic:

Before, Christ gave to the powerful emperor
Constantine the cross for salvation;
Now, our emperor in God Nikephoros puts to
flight the tribes of the barbarians, because he
possesses it.⁸⁵

As in the Limburg epigram, the salvational nature of the cross is affirmed, if less emphatically, and like the latter, the word Constantine is written above the cross bar and barbarian at the bottom of the vertical section. Also as in the Limburg inscription, the initial conjunction *καὶ* marks the textual units at verses one and three. Distinguished temporally, these are the past and present (*Καὶ πρὸν* and *Καὶ νῦν*) that correspond to the historical past of the front side and the living present of the inscription on the reverse. Once more implicative logic applies. Because Christ gave the cross to Constantine, the emperor Nikephoros, who now possesses it, prevails against barbarians. Scholarly consensus holds that the emperor named on the Cortona reliquary is Nikephoros II Phokas, who was indeed successful at putting barbarians to flight, as the inscription states.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Frolow, *Relique de la vraie croix*, 240.

⁸⁵ Κ(αὶ) πρὸν κραταιῶ δεσπότη Κωνσταντίνῳ / Χ(ριστῷ), δέδωκε στ(αυ)ρὸν εἰ(ς) σωτηρίαν / Κ(αὶ) νῦν δὲ τοῦτον ἐν θ(ε)ῷ Νικηφόρος / ἀναξ τροποῦται φύλα βαρβάρων ἔχων. Text and translations from Oikonomides, "Holy War" (above, n. 5), 79.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 83. Possibly chronologically relevant to these crosses is a True Cross reliquary in the Treasury of the Vatican. The inscription on the back of the cross concludes that with it the "Lord of the earth"

The inscription's emphasis on the chain of evidence from Christ to Constantine to Nikephoros helps to interpret the design of the public side of the reliquary (fig. 13). More than an orderly disposition of elements, the central axis of Christ, the cross relic, and Constantine graphically expresses the transfer of power from Christ to Constantine by means of the victory-bringing cross. While the four larger figures at the side of the cross might seem to be the principals in the composition, the center of any Byzantine composition is superior to the sides, and this reliquary is no exception. The lateral figures serve, instead, to call attention to the relic and the history offered by the medallions at the bottom row that are centered on Constantine.

The tenth century witnessed a renewed interest in the emperor Constantine. He is portrayed prominently with Justinian in the lunette of the southwest vestibule on Hagia Sophia, where he is inscribed as "Constantine, the Great Emperor among the saints."⁸⁷ Although it could be somewhat earlier, the mosaic has been published as a work of the middle or the latter half of the tenth century.⁸⁸ During this period, a dynastic relationship to the emperor Constantine was of prime concern to Byzantine emperors. Constantine VII in his later years stressed his supposed genealogical connection with the first emperor of same name. A decade or so later, Nikephoros Phokas similarly claimed ancestral ties with Constantine but through the Phocas family.⁸⁹

However, compared to the Limburg Staurotheke, the Cortona ivory is less closely connected with the imperial court and was never intended to be an object taken into battle, even symbolically or ceremonially. Rather, Oikonomides correctly interprets it as an unofficial expression of the prevailing ideology of the

prevails against demons and barbarians. The δεσπότης is identified only as Πωμανός, who thus may be Emperor Romanos I to IV. See Frolow, *Relique de la vraie croix*, 231–33, and S. G. Mercati, "La stau-roteca di Maestricht ora nella basilica vaticana e una presunta epigrafe della chiesa del calvario," *MemPontAcc* 1.2 (1924): 45–63, pl. XXV–XXVI.

⁸⁷ Κωνσταντίνος δὲν ἄγιος μέγας βασιλεύς. T. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: Second Preliminary Report of Work Done in 1933 and 1934* (Paris, 1936), 25.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 30–31; C. Mango in H. Kähler, *Hagia Sophia* (New York, 1967), 55.

⁸⁹ A. Markopoulos, "Constantine the Great in Macedonian Historiography: Models and Approaches," in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino (Brookfield, VT, 1994), 164–70.

day.⁹⁰ Although Nikephoros did not go to war with it, the imagery and inscription of the Cortona reliquary presumes that other objects did serve this function. Certainly as emperor, Nikephoros Phokas possessed relics of the True Cross. Moreover, Stephanos, the keeper of the church treasures of Hagia Sophia and the person who had the reliquary and its inscriptions made, thought its militant imperial/religious subject matter appropriate for a gift to his home monastery. A similar gifting from Constantinople of a related program of imperial imagery to a monastery may account for the presence of the aforementioned processional cross at the Lavra, if tradition is correct and the monastery's founder, Nikephoros Phokas, provided this object as well as other support for the monastery. For aid in war, emperors of the period sought the prayers of monks,⁹¹ and having objects in monasteries that reminded monks of emperors' continuing need for divine support would be ever useful.

The principal side of the Cortona reliquary (fig. 13), in sum, is an example of the Byzantine art of war, although few would recognize it as such were it not for the cruciform inscription on the back. Fewer still, if any, will see here a resemblance to the miniature in the Psalter of Basil II (fig. 3), to which I now return and conclude. However, their messages about the divine source of authority are similar. In both, Christ gives an emperor the means to conquer. To avoid any misunderstanding, the painter explicitly represented angels carrying symbols of power from Jesus down to Basil. In contrast, Stephanos or his designer relied on clarity of design, the talismanic agency of the relic, and especially the inscription to attest that because the cross passed from Christ to Constantine to Nikephoros, the emperor defeats barbarians.

Like the medallions of Christ and Constantine on the ivory, the significance for Basil II of the framed busts of the saints at the sides in the Venice miniature would remain unexplained, were it not for the last two lines of the epigram on the preceding page:

⁹⁰ Oikonomides, "Holy War" (above, n. 5), 85–86. Another True Cross reliquary in the Vatican names an emperor Romanos and may be of this period. It has an inscription that mentions similar themes to the foregoing, including barbarians and life-giving wood that the emperor decorates. See Frolov, *Relique de la vraie croix* (above, n. 78), 231–32.

⁹¹ McGeer, "Two Military Orations" (above, n. 74), 124–25.

The martyrs fight along with him as a friend,
Throwing down those lying at his feet.

By this point, it is hard to distinguish this action from those described on the Lavra cross (throw down our enemies) or the True Crosses in Limburg (crush barbarians) and Cortona (put to flight), although different verbs are used in each instance. However, the verb in the Cortona inscription, *τροποῦται* (puts to flight), does reappear on an ivory triptych at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome (fig. 15).⁹² The latter, in turn, leads back to the Venice miniature:

An emperor had the four martyrs sculpted;
With them he puts to flight the enemies by
authority.⁹³

Here, like the Psalter illumination, the agents are martyrs, not the cross, and they banish enemies, not barbarians.

This last inscription appears on the left wing of the triptych between four military warriors, above Theodore Tiron and an unidentified armed martyr bearing a cross and a sword and below Prokopios and Arethas. The right wing has four more military saints, Theodore Stratelates and George above, Demetrios and Eustratios below. In between is the inscription:

Here is the foursome of the martyrs,
Who decorate the crown with the four virtues.⁹⁴

The central panel presents a Deësis in the upper register and five apostles below (James, John, Peter, Paul, and Andrew). The longer epigram in between ends with two lines that identify the patron:

While the hand and the chisel were at a loss
trying to represent Christ,

⁹² Oikonomides, "Holy War," 69–77; E. Kantorowicz, "Ivories and Litanies," *JWarb* 5 (1942): 74–75; Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, *Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen* (above, n. 3), 2:33, pl. X; Cutler, *Hand of the Master*, 157–58, 208, 210, 220, 251; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power* (above, n. 59), 82–83; Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme* (above, n. 77), 337–42.

⁹³ Ἀναξ ὁ τεύχας μαρτύρων τὴν τετράδα / τούτοις τροποῦται δυσμενεῖς κατακράτος: Oikonomides, "Holy War," 73.

⁹⁴ Ιδοὺ πάρεστιν ἡ τετρακτύς μαρτύρων / τῶν ἀρετῶν κοσμοῦσα τετράδι στέφος: ibid.



FIG. 15 Rome, Palazzo Venezia, Triptych of Deësis and Saints, ivory (photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

Christ was teaching and giving breath (to the images);
He speaks to his mother and to the Prodromos,
And as if he were sending out his disciples, he says:
Release Constantine from all illness,
And I will subject to him all powers.⁹⁵

It has long been agreed that the emperor mentioned in the left wing and here further identified on the

95 Ως ἡπόρει χείρ καὶ γλυφίς Χριστοῦ τύπῳ / Χριστὸς διδάσκων καὶ πνοὴν ἣν εἰσφέρων· / καὶ συλλαλεῖ γὰρ μητρὶ καὶ τῷ Προδρόμῳ / καὶ τοὺς μαθητὰς ὁσπερ ἐκπέμπων λέγει· / Κωνσταντίνον λυτροῦσθε παντοίων νόσων / ἐγώ δὲ τούτῳ πᾶν ὑποστρώσω κέρας; ibid., 73, 75.

central panel must be Constantine VII.⁹⁶ Responding to a prior plea of this Constantine, Christ addresses the prime intercessors—the Virgin and John the Baptist in the upper register—and indirectly the disciples in the lower register, and orders that Constantine be released from suffering. The whole triptych can be understood as an extended Deësis, consisting of the core figures of Jesus, the Baptist, and Mary, plus the disciples and saints. The inscriptions on the wings give the saints represented there additional roles. One set of martyrs puts down barbarians, while the other graces the king and his kingdom with virtue.

The triptych provides another example of the rich visual culture of war in the middle years of the tenth

96 Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, *Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 2:17.

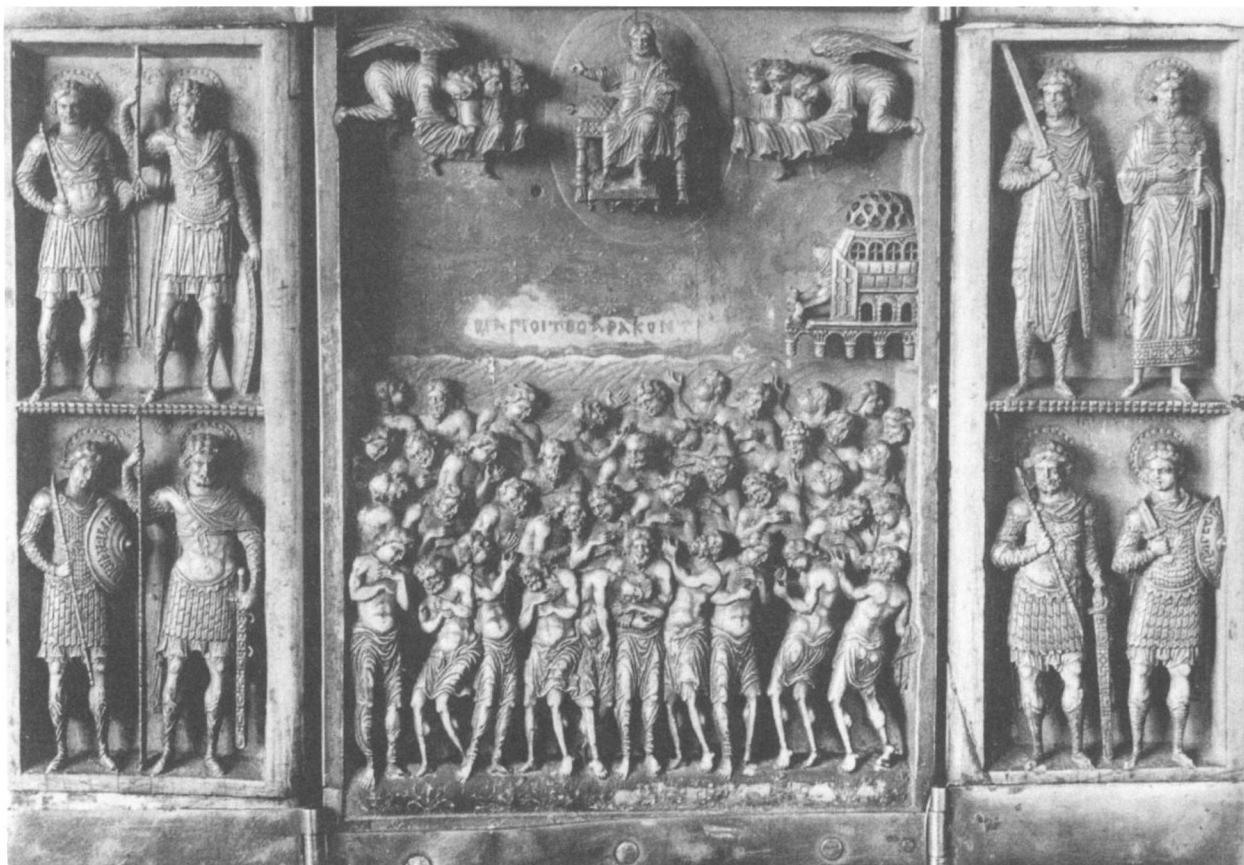


FIG. 16 St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum, Triptych of Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia

century that included the aforementioned Joshua Roll and ivories based upon it.⁹⁷ According to the inscriptions on the ivory in the Palazzo Venezia, divine aid in war comes by means of military saints, not crosses or cross relics, as the inscription and the presence of the eight warriors affirm. The Palazzo Venezia triptych is not alone in its attention to such saints. Holy warriors also appear on the wings of the related triptychs in the Louvre (Harbaville) and the Museo Sacro of the Vatican,⁹⁸ and they are the principal subject of the handsome ivory triptych in the Hermitage from

the same period (fig. 16).⁹⁹ Its central panel depicts the death of the forty martyrs of Sebasteia, Roman soldiers who were stripped of their garments and left to die on a frozen lake. The martyrs writhe in agony or call out to an enthroned Christ in heaven, who is adored by prostrating angels in a fashion not dissimilar from the attitude of the emperor in the mosaic above the imperial door at Hagia Sophia (fig. 1). Other fully clothed and armed holy warriors occupy the two wings of the Hermitage triptych. There they stand tall and statuesque, as if they were the flanks of a heavenly army held in reserve and ready to come to the rescue of their embattled comrades, thereby assuring the ultimate victory of military saints.

The cult of these holy warriors received renewed attention in the Macedonian period, when they became

97 See n. 3, above.

98 Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, *Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 2:34–35, pls. XI–XIII; Cutler, *Hand of the Master*, 220–21; I. Kalavrezou in Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium* (above, n. 3), 131–34.

99 Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, *Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 2:27, pl. III; Cutler, *Hand of the Master*, 30–32, 221.

virtual state symbols.¹⁰⁰ That devotion began at least as early as Leo VI, the father of Constantine VII. According to the Life of St. Theophano, the first wife of Leo, he had been unjustly accused of plotting against his father Basil I and condemned. In a dream, Leo saw a young man who had come from Thessalonike. He was armed and carried a spear in his right hand and a shield in his left.¹⁰¹ Leo took him to be St. Demetrios, perhaps because he came from that city, the well-known site of his cult, but possibly also because he recognized the man from his well-established portrait. Visions of saints typically match images of the period.¹⁰² For example, an ivory (fig. 17), probably dating to later in the tenth century, represents St. Demetrios in full armor resting his left hand on a large shield, although in this case without a spear in his right hand.¹⁰³ However, one of the warrior saints on the left wing of the St. Petersburg triptych (fig. 16) does display the implements described. In the dream, Leo's visitor assured him that his father would soon realize that Leo was innocent, which proved to be correct. As a result, Leo built a church in honor of the saint and wrote three homilies about him.¹⁰⁴

Later in the century, some of the martyrs of Sebastea are shown with Emperor John Tzimiskes at the Pigeon House in Çavuşin in Cappadocia.¹⁰⁵ Now

100 P. Schreiner, "Aspekte der politischen Heiligenverehrung in Byzanz," in *Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter*, ed. J. Petersohn (Sigmaringen, 1994), 373–74; B. Schrade, "Byzantium and Its Eastern Barbarians: The Cult of Saints in Svaneti's," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, March 1999*, ed. A. Eastmond (Burlington, VT, 2001), 173–74.

101 E. Kurtz, "Zwei griechische Texte über die Hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI.," *Mémoires de l'Académie impériale des sciences de St.-Pétersbourg: Classe historico-philologique*, 8e série, 3,2 (1898): 10; P. Magdalino, "Saint Demetrios and Leo VI," *BSL* 51 (1990): 198–99.

102 H. Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, 1996), 5–47.

103 C. T. Little, in Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium* (above, n. 3), 134–35. On seals, Demetrios begins to be shown armed with some frequency from the 10th and later centuries, according to the evidence assembled by John Cotsonis and cited in A. Cutler, "Inscriptions and Iconography on Some Middle Byzantine Ivories, I: The Monuments and Their Dating," in *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio*, vol. 2 (Spoleto, 1991), 654, n. 36.

104 Magdalino, "Saint Demetrios and Leo VI," 198.

105 L. Rodley, "The Pigeon House Church, Çavuşin," *JÖB* 33 (1983): 316–19; N. Thierry, *Haut Moyen Âge en Cappadoce: Les églises de la région de Çavuşin*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1983), 49–51; N. Thierry, "Un



FIG. 17 New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, St. Demetrios, ivory (photo: Metropolitan Museum)

fully armed with swords drawn, they stand beside the emperor on horseback and seemingly offer more than spiritual aid. That was what John I received from an unknown man on a white horse who led the Byzantine forces in 971 against the Rus' at Dorystolon on the Danube. This mysterious warrior was identified as St. Theodore because the emperor had previously called upon his help in battle, and the day before the battle a nun in Constantinople had a vision that the Virgin was sending St. Theodore, "a brave young man in armor," to help the imperial forces. After the victory was secured, John Tzimiskes renamed the city Theodoroupolis in

portrait de Jean Tzimiskès en Cappadoce," *TM* 9 (1985): 477–84; Walter, *Warrior Saints* (above, n. 2,4), 174–75, 282–83.



FIG. 18 Rome, Vat. Lib. Gr. 1613, p. 383, Menologion of Basil II, St. Theodore Stratelates (photo: by permission of Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved)

honor of St. Theodore Stratelates.¹⁰⁶ The relationship of St. Theodore to tenth-century emperors was physically close. In the imperial palace, the chapel of St. Theodore was located next to the audience hall, the Chrysotriklinos. In the chapel were kept one of the emperor's principal relics and symbols of authority, the Rod of Moses, and various jeweled staffs and swords.¹⁰⁷

The first saint to the right of Basil II in the Venice Psalter (the viewer's left) at the top of the row and thus

in the most privileged position is St. Theodore without additional designation. Since the ninth century, Theodore had become two saints, Theodore the Recruit (Tiron) or Theodore the General (Stratelates), but these epithets were not used consistently.¹⁰⁸ For example, in Leo the Deacon's telling of the miracle at Dorystolon, St. Theodore is first mentioned with no other identification, and only after Tzimiskes changes the city's name to Theodoroupolis is he called Stratelates. In the second major manuscript associated with Basil II, the so-called Menologion in the Vatican (Bibl. Vat. Gr. 1613), the sole military saint depicted in full military dress is Theodore Stratelates (fig. 18).¹⁰⁹ He stands in the same pose with his right hand on a spear as Basil

¹⁰⁶ Leo the Deacon, 9.12, CSHB (Bonn ed., 1828, 153–54, 158); Talbot and Sullivan, *Leo the Deacon* (above, n. 60), 197–98, 200. See also S. McGrath, "The Battles of Dorostolon (971)," in *Peace and War in Byzantium* (above, n. 5), 160–63.

¹⁰⁷ See n. 13 above and R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, pt. 1, *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat œcuménique*, vol. 3, *Les églises et les monastères*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1960), 149–50.

¹⁰⁸ Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 44–66.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 273.

in the Venice Psalter and wears the same body armor. Like Basil, Theodore carries a sword, but his is mainly hidden behind his body; only the tip is visible at the left. The saint is additionally armed with a small round shield. Nevertheless, the general resemblance between the two warriors is so close that they appear to be members of the same army or, as the epigram accompanying the imperial portrait proclaims, friends and allies in battle.¹¹⁰

Saints Theodore Tiron and Stratelates occupy the upper register of the lateral wings of the triptych in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome (fig. 15), and there George is at the right, as in the miniature. In both the triptych and the Psalter illumination, the martyrs occupy lateral positions. Thus there is visual and thematic continuity between an ivory made for Constantine VII and a portrait of his grandson in the manuscript in Venice, but there also is a crucial difference here, namely, the format of the saints' portraits in the manuscript. Bust length, these pictures within a picture are framed either by interconnecting squares or circles, a device long seen from late antique floor mosaics to tenth-century manuscripts.¹¹¹ Although visually separate and aloof, the martyrs in the Venice Psalter, according to the epigram, take an active role and fight with Basil as his friend and ally. They, not the emperor and his God-given spear, throw down the people lying at his feet.

The apparent contradiction between the epigram and the miniature is resolved if the saints' images are understood as icons. Icons had long been regarded as powerful, wonder-working agents. Scaled appropriately, painted on a gold ground, given a simple frame, each has the visual characteristics of an icon, and each has or had an identifying inscription, an important feature of

holy images after Iconoclasm.¹¹² Moreover, these icons are placed close to Basil, so that they could indeed be his allies. If he did not have his hands otherwise occupied, he could have reached out and held one of these panels in his hand, just as he was said to have done at Abydos, when he confronted the rebellious troops of Bardas Phokas in 989 with a sword in his right hand and an icon of the Virgin in his left, or as the empress Theodora, who restored icons at the end of Iconoclasm, is depicted in the Menologion of Basil II, holding in her left hand a circular icon of Christ, bust length and inscribed on a gold ground.¹¹³

In the early eleventh century, the miniature of Basil II in the Psalter in Venice represents the fully developed Byzantine art of war after Iconoclasm. Of that former ancient tradition of the ruler triumphant over subject people, as seen in the Barberini ivory, only the prostrate peoples remain. Imperial power is no longer physical and personal. Humble before God, the Byzantine emperor reigns as regent of Christ on the earth and prevails in battle with the aid of his heavenly allies, the military saints. Basil II's symbols of authority, the spear and crown, are conferred by Christ, but the holy warriors, not the emperor's spear, subdue his enemies. The military saints, visually manifest in the form of icons, are more powerful than the actual weapons of war; hence, the plethora of images of these saints in art associated with the court in the middle and second half of the tenth century. Relics of the True Cross also constituted potent agents in the Byzantine art of war in the tenth century, but in future years, icons would increase in significance in Byzantine culture, especially after 1204 and the profound loss of relics. As the empire grew weaker, later Byzantine rulers, patrons, and artists devoted particular attention to military saints in Palaiologan monuments such as the church of the Chora.¹¹⁴ Images of holy warriors grew larger

110 The similarity may also be credited to the same artist painting both images. The miniature in the Menologion is by Pantoleon, as indicated by his name in the right margin. He was the chief illuminator of the atelier responsible for the manuscript: Ševčenko, "Illuminators" (above, n. 24), 245–76. The Psalter miniature has been attributed to him as well: Iacobini, "De Basilio I a Basilio II" (above, n. 49), 214 with further literature.

111 E.g., portraits medallions on a floor mosaic in Lebanon: H. Belting and G. Cavallo, *Die Bibel des Niketas: Ein Werk der höfischen Buchkunst in Byzanz und sein antikes Vorbild* (Wiesbaden, 1979), 46, fig. 50b; author portraits in the 10th-century Book of Prophets in Turin, Bibl. Naz. Cod. B.I.2: ibid., pls. 7–8; ornament in 10th-century manuscripts: Weitzmann, *Die byzantinische Buchmalerei* (above, n. 49), figs. 49, 56, 107, 113.

112 Maguire, *Icons of Their Bodies*, 100–145.

113 Vat. gr. 1613, p. 392: *El "Menologio" de Basilio II Emperador de Bizancio* (Vat. gr. 1613) (Madrid, 2006), 392.

114 Saints George and Demetrios in the vault of the outer narthex at the entrance to the church belong to a sequence of saints associated with the emperor and the aristocracy. See R. S. Nelson, "Heavenly Allies at the Chora," *Gesta* 43 (2004): 31–40. The military saints in the parekklesion of the Chora are yet more impressive and deserve their own study. In about 1310, a Byzantine painter from Constantinople painted a large fresco of St. George slaying the dragon at the cathedral of Genoa, an example of a Byzantine military

in proportion to other figures, their clothing became more detailed, and their armaments more realistic, while emperors remained stiff, formal, and remote and are seldom portrayed in military dress.

Department of the History
of Art
Yale University
P.O. Box 208272
New Haven, CT 06520-8272
robert.nelson@yale.edu

saint being adapted for a Western patron. See idem, "Byzantine Icons in Genoa before the Mandylion," in *Intorno al Sacro Volto: Genova, Bisanzio e il Mediterraneo (secoli XI–XIV)*, ed. A. R. C. Masetti et al. (Venice, 2007), 86–87, pl. V.